



ASSEMBLY BILL 2193

Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Workload Relief

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ISSUE

Each year in California, over half a million children come to the attention of the child welfare system through reports of abuse and/or neglect. County child welfare agencies are mandated to protect children and do so by providing prevention, early intervention, and case management services. However, excessive workloads for county social workers seriously impede services to children and families and thwarts counties from reaching desired outcomes in child welfare. As a result, children and families suffer.

A number of factors have contributed to increased workload. The past 20 years has seen a significant increase in drug use, family violence and family dysfunction. These issues have exacerbated the complexity and severity of the problems encountered by children and families served in our child welfare system. New, often unfunded state laws, regulations and court decisions further strain social workers in meeting various mandates. As a result, social workers today face tremendous hardship in meeting workload demands within a complex child welfare system.

EXISTING LAW

In 1998, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed SB 2030 (Costa), directing the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to commission a study of workload standards in child welfare. The resulting findings confirmed that existing child welfare standards—based on 1984 workload considerations—were outdated and inadequate.

The SB 2030 Child Welfare Workload Study then recommended both *minimum* and *optimal* caseload standards for budgeting the child welfare program. When compared to the existing budgeting standards in place at that time, **the findings revealed that California's workload was roughly double the recommended *minimum* standards.**

Subsequent legislation required CDSS to develop a plan to implement the findings of the SB 2030 Workload Study. In 2002, a CDSS task force consisting of many stakeholders including educators, nonprofit and county social workers and other representatives, former foster youth and foster parents, and professional organizations, developed a plan to implement the recommendations of the Child Welfare Services Workload Study of 2000.

Unfortunately, the recommendations were never fully funded. In the meantime, caseload demands have continued to increase. As a result, California has steadily fallen behind in addressing social worker caseloads.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The current caseload standards threaten our ability to achieve systemic improvements in child welfare. Both the State's Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636, Steinberg), which took effect on January 1, 2004, and the federally-required Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), require the state and counties to improve outcomes for children and their families in the child welfare system.

Child welfare workers are the vital component of the child welfare system, working with the courts, communities and care providers to ensure that children are safe, families are linked to needed services and foster children have permanent connections to family and caring adults. However, overburdened child welfare workers cannot meet the ever increasing demands for serving children and families. California will never achieve its desired outcomes in child welfare—safety, permanency and well-being—without a strategic investment in the social workers who are vital in providing services.

AB 2193 SUMMARY

AB 2193 implements the recommendations of the SB 2030 Task Force to reduce child welfare workload through a five-year phased-in approach. Commencing with the 2006-07 fiscal year, the budgeting standard would incrementally change and be fully implemented by the end of 2010-11 fiscal year.

Based on the findings of the SB 2030 Workload Study, AB 2193 would implement the optimal workload standards over five years. **Below is a comparison of the current standards and optimal standards:**

	Current cases/wkr	SB 2030 cases/wkr
Screening, Hotline & Intake:	322.5	68.7
Emergency Response:	15.8	9.9
Family Maintenance	35.0	10.2
Family Reunification	27.0	11.9
Permanency Planning	54.0	16.4

AB 2193 is consistent with both federal and state outcome improvement and accountability efforts. This bill requires counties to develop local plans with key stakeholders, including social workers, foster youth and parents in the child welfare system, to develop a plan to provide social workers with additional time and/or supports that will address workload issues and reach desired outcomes for children and families. Such plans would also be incorporated into existing county self improvement plans which are required under AB 636 and approved by local Boards of Supervisors and CDSS.

NEED FOR THE BILL

- The SB 2030 Child Welfare Workload Study, conducted by the American Humane Association, proved what many had suspected – in many areas caseloads were twice as high as they should be to meet even basic requirements.
- The 2030 study was found to be consistent with the national recommended caseload standards established by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA).
- Consent decrees and court orders in other states have since forced those states to reduce social worker caseload to the same degree found in the SB 2030 Workload Study. In fact, over 10 states have been forced to implement lower caseload standards through class-action law suits.

- In 2001, AB 364 (Aroner) attempted to put the findings of the study into law; budget constraints at that time prevented its passage.
- The reality is these dangerously high caseloads directly jeopardize the health and safety of both the children and families within the system.
- Overworked child welfare staff cannot provide the quality services that children and the public deserve.
- Increased workload with minimal relief has resulted in a turnover crisis within the child welfare system, robbing the system of experienced, high quality professionals.
- Overburdened and inexperienced child welfare staff reduces the quality of services to children and families and impedes the state and counties from improving outcomes for children and families.

SUPPORT

CO-SPONSORS:

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

County Welfare Directors Association of CA (CWDA)

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

OPPOSITION

None on file.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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